

Ji-AAnjichigeyang

'to change the way we do things'

Retention of American Indian Students in Teacher Education

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Amy A. Bergstrom

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Frank Guldbrandsen, Ph.D

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Chapter One

Introduction

In kindergarten I was told that I could not sing, in fourth grade I was told I could not do Math or English, in seventh grade I was told I would never go to college let alone finish high school. (--Marie, 2006, Native American college graduate)

Stories like this resound throughout American Indian students' educational experience. The education of American Indian students has at times been referred to as a national tragedy. Unfortunately, it is these experiences that contribute to American Indians leaving the educational system. For example, only 40% of American Indian students graduate from school in the state of Minnesota (Education Resource Center, 2008). Unfortunately, this rate of failure is similar to the same findings from the Kennedy Report on Indian Education: A National Tragedy-A National Challenge published in 1969. According to the Kennedy Report American Indian students continue to lag behind at or near the bottom of every educational indicator (Peacock, 2002, p. 12).

Good teachers can affect retention and reverse stories like the one quoted at the beginning of this chapter. A federal program called The American Indian Teacher Initiative sought to recruit and graduate one thousand new American Indian teachers over a five-year period to improve the school experiences of American Indian students (Beaulieu & Figueira, 2006). A study on teachers of American Indian students by Miller Cleary and Peacock (1998) indicated a connection between student performance and teacher/student relationships. For example, when there is a good Native teacher the relationship between the Native teacher and the Native student is enhanced (Swisher, & Tippeconnic, 1999).

According to HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002), student retention is one of the most challenging issues facing higher education today. Educational literature indicates that when students fail to complete educational programs, serious adverse conditions plague individuals, their families, and their communities. Jeria and Roth (1992) cite college attendance of American Indian students lagging far behind Black and Hispanic attendance indicating that only 55% of American Indians graduate from high school and of these only 17% go on to college. Current trends indicate that students of color participate in and complete higher education at much lower rates than White students (Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Little is known about factors that influence retention and completion of American Indian students in a baccalaureate teacher licensure program. To date, very little research has been reported about American Indian students in these programs, while the literature on other minority students in teacher education is voluminous. Few of these studies pertain to or deal with the unique challenges American Indian students experience in higher education.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is twofold: to understand factors that influence retention of American Indian students in a baccalaureate teacher licensure program and to understand the study participants' perceptions of these factors.

Significance of the Study

American Indian students attend college at lower rates than any other minority group (Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, 2001). With the exception of tribal

colleges, there are only a handful of higher education institutions that accommodate the needs of American Indian students. Over the last 350 years American Indians have been grossly underrepresented in America's higher education institutions (CHI Xapkaid & Inglebret, 2007). According to James (2004), American Indian education must redefine itself with programs that give meaning to the lives and culture of American Indians.

Despite ongoing efforts to hire, train, and license more Indian people to fill America's classrooms, the gap is still far too wide. There is a general lack of American Indian teachers serving Indian students in the nation's tribal and public school systems. Only 38% of the teachers in Bureau of Indian Affairs/tribal schools and 15% of the teachers in high Indian enrollment public schools are American Indian (Pavel, 1999b). According to Basit et al. (2006), the lack of minority students in teacher education is due, at least in part, to negative and racist experiences in the schooling system, presenting a challenge to policy makers and the schools themselves.

Head Start, elementary and secondary schools all need qualified, well-trained, culturally responsive teachers in their schools. According to Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999), both the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force hearing and the White House Conference on Indian Education affirmed the need for research and the development of programs and materials from a Native perspective. But today, in the state of Minnesota, only 3.6% of licensed teachers represent a minority population while 19% of the students are minority. And of this 3.6%, less than 1% reflects American Indian licensed teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In addition, of the 3,099 bachelor's degrees conferred in elementary education in Minnesota from 1998 to 2001, only 13 went to American Indians.

According to Miller-Cleary and Peacock (1998), every human being has the right to look to a future that does not have a ceiling; we should dare to dream. When American Indian students in America's classrooms look to their classroom teachers they should see a reflection of themselves, creating a mirror-like image to reinforce the importance of their education and enhance their educational experience. Training American Indian teachers will provide this mirror-like image. Bergstrom, Miller-Cleary, and Peacock (2003) assert training effective Native teachers is critical in undoing the historical trauma education has inflicted upon Native people.

Research Question

The question that guides this research is a two part question: What are the factors that influence retention of American Indian students in a baccalaureate teacher education program and what are the participants' perceptions of these factors? In accordance with this overarching theme, ten questions were asked of program participants.

Assumptions of the Study

There are three assumptions of this study. One assumption was that the results of the study would aid in understanding retention factors pertaining to American Indian students, specifically by looking at American Indian students' perceptions of these factors. A second assumption was that teacher education programs would be developed and/or enhanced to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation of American Indian students interested in becoming teachers. Finally, it is an assumption of this study that the critical need for American Indian teachers would pique the interest of faculty, staff, department heads, deans, and chancellors so systemic support can be provided towards this initiative.

Summary

The need for American Indian teachers is great and the importance of Native teachers is even greater. The need for Native teachers is premised on an understanding of self-determination and community-based education for Indigenous communities (Figueira, 2006). Reyhner and Eder (2004) point out that the scant national attention American Indian education does receive oftentimes focuses on poor academic performance. One important aspect of retention research is that it is useful in exemplifying the problem and offering remedies. According to Rendon, Jalomo, and Amavry (2000), as societies become more multicultural and complex, careful investigation of multiracial students will be merited. This study was a small piece of a larger puzzle. It was the hope of this study to offer stories of success. The results will contribute to an even greater body of literature on American Indian student retention and will hopefully contribute to decreasing American Indian student departure in higher education, specifically teacher education.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Education has a transitional function of moving individuals from one status or condition to another. In the old days we used to mark these transitions by giving the individual a new name, a name that would more accurately summarize his or her achievements. Today we award certificates, diplomas, and degrees to mark each step the student takes. Education itself is transitional. (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 79)

Until recently, research into the education of Indian students has not made a tremendous amount of difference. Despite over a quarter century of tribal, state, and local efforts at implementing various programs, including teacher education programs directed at the identified needs of Indian students, overall dropout and test achievement data have not improved. Data collected by the Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education in 1969 could be superimposed over data collected by the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force in 1992 with the results indicating that little has changed regarding Indian education (Peacock, 2002). According to Harjo (2000) little has changed for the education of American Indian students, American Indian students are entering the 21st century under similar conditions as they entered the 20th century.

Yet, research has made progress in other areas. We now are more aware of cultural differences and know more about the learning styles of Indian students. We know that caring teachers make a difference in the decisions students make to either press on or leave school prior to graduation (Miller-Cleary & Peacock, 1998). We also know that a strong foundation in culture and language does not interfere with but actually enhances

overall achievement for most young Indian people (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). But more research is necessary.

This study looked closely at the literature and asks what factors affect American Indian retention in higher education, specifically teacher education. According to Moustakas (1994), review of the professional and research literature connected to the research topic and question was conducted. Further, Creswell (2003) indicates that the literature review, in essence, shares results closely related to the study being reported. It was the intent of this study to examine data from numerous sources in an attempt to note similarities and differences in American Indian students' experiences in education from historical to contemporary times, and to closely examine teacher education. An attempt will be made to identify gaps that exist in the literature and to offer remedies. The chapter includes an overview of student retention in higher education, retention of students of color, the educational experiences of American Indians from boarding schools to present, retention of Native students in teacher education programs, and the need for Native teachers.

Student Retention

Student retention in higher education is one of the most important issues facing higher education today. Research by Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) indicates college student departure poses a longstanding problem to colleges and universities, a problem that attracts the interest of both scholars and practitioners indicating approximately 50% of students leave higher education making student retention a critical issue facing higher education today. Only about 60% of high school students who graduate will attend college and only about 50% of this number will ever earn a degree

(Center for the Study of College Student Retention, 2008). In spite of many new and innovative retention improvement programs established over the past decade, retention rates have not improved. Research results continue to indicate that over one-third of all students who enroll in college will drop out annually (Heldman, 2008). Student departure in higher education research spans more than 70 years and has become a much-studied problem (Braxton et al., 2004). According to Swail (2004), student retention is just as pertinent now as when Tinto published his first integration model. The premise of Tinto's model is that social and academic integration are essential to student retention (Braxton, 2000). Swail further indicates, in the 1970's and 1980's public policy was primarily focused on access, with legislation aimed at reducing barriers to higher education. By the mid 1990's, however, focus shifted from access to issues of choice, affordability, and persistence. "For the past 100 years, the institutional graduation rate has held at 50% and retention is a persistent problem in higher education" (2004, p. 3). According to Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004), although colleges and universities strive to develop well-planned, tailored retention programs, retention is dynamic and calls for programs to focus on both academic and non-academic needs. As Heldman (2008) points out, a full-scale retention program seems daunting but the return to the institution as a whole is great, with improved retention rates contributing to the reputation of the institution.

HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) argue that student retention in higher education is one of the most challenging issues facing educators today. Educational literature suggests that when students fail to complete educational programs serious adverse conditions plague individuals, their families, and their communities. Tinto (1993)

indicates that to the degree retention is everybody's business, so too is the retention of students of color everybody's business and not solely the concern of a few administrators and support staff working within educational programs. According to Braxton (2000) new models that consider the key issues associated with the experiences of students of color in higher education are needed. "Access and completion for African Americans, Hispanic, and Native American students have always lagged behind those of white and Asian students" (Swail, 2004, p. 3). Racial gaps in college have widened over the past two decades, which calls for aggressive gap-closing goals to be set (Somerville, 2006).

Student retention research has also focused on first to second year retention, with the understanding that this is the time when a greater number of students will withdraw from college. McClanahan (2004) points out that the attrition rate, while diminishing in the final two years of college, is still a factor, indicating the need for retention efforts throughout a student's college experience. Heldman (2008) indicates few universities have found a workable solution to the retention problem. According to Somerville (2006), the socio-economic status of the student can have a profound effect on retention rates, as does the student's gender and race.

The number of minority students attending colleges has risen over the past two decades as enrollment rates have increased across the board but while access to and participation in postsecondary education opportunities have increased, minority students continue to be less likely to complete college than Caucasian students (Somerville, 2006). The Minnesota Minority Education Partnership concludes that over the next ten years higher education institutions will see an increase of students of color enrolled which is

not due to an increase in the rate of attendance but rather an increase in the overall population (2001).

Another variable to this crisis is the fact that the demographic makeup of the United States is changing rapidly. A report by the U.S. Census Bureau projects that within 30 years Hispanic and African Americans will constitute over one-third of the American population (Lotkowski et al., 2004). Given these increased numbers, more and more students, especially minorities, will be enrolling in college. However, the challenge remains: enrolling students in college is one thing, retaining them and conferring their degrees is another. It will be critical for Higher education institutions to design strategies that increase the participation and graduation of students of color (Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, 2001).

“The research on minority college students is relatively young” (Braxton, 2000, p. 130). Despite an increase in higher education and degrees granted, departure for students of color and minorities differs appreciably from Caucasian students (Braxton et al., 2004). According to Astin (1985) the number of minorities in higher education increased in the 1960’s and 1970’s but has continued to decline since then. Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) indicate that in higher education students of color, including African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, continue to be underrepresented. According to Astin (1985), America’s higher education systems are for the most part homogenous. By examining factors that lead to academic success for students from diverse backgrounds it is hoped that programs can be developed for these populations (Clark et al., 2006). Heldman (2008) concurs that once an institution identifies retention challenges and risk factors it is time for the development of a plan to address the issues.

The need for such programs is self-evident. According to Clark et al. (2006), “From 1999-2000, White students earned 75% of bachelor’s degrees, Black students 9 %, Hispanic students 6% and the remaining 10% went to international students and/or students of other races” (p. 123). Further, a study done by the US Department of Education from 1995-1996 indicates that, among all students, White students will graduate from a four year institution at the rate of 60% over a period of six years while Asian students will graduate at a rate of 65% and Native American students will graduate at a rate of 39% (Somerville, 2006). Steele makes clear that African American students, for example, drop out not because they lack a sense of the value of higher education but, rather, because they lack a sense of identification with the school they attend (as cited in Hobson-Horton & Owens, 2004). Braxton (2000) suggests that minority students are not likely to give up their connections with their cultural group to find membership in the college world. According to Tinto (1993), four clusters stand out as to why students leave school: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation.

According to Astin (1985), Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and American Indians comprise the four largest disadvantaged minority groups in the United States. Tinto’s (1993) study indicates that individuals from disadvantaged and/or minority groups are much more likely to be found in public schools, lower quality public schools in particular, which indicates they will be less well prepared for college. Braxton et al. (2004) concur that racial and ethnic minorities often face barriers in their attempt to complete degree programs. Swail indicates student retention in higher education is a costly and problematic issue (2004).

Boarding Schools/U.S. Government

“The formal education of Indigenous people of North America began at virtually the moment in which the European drive to colonize the continent began in earnest” (Noriega, 1992, p. 371). From early missionary schools to boarding schools the education of American Indians was part of an ongoing attempt to assimilate American Indians into White society. The goal of this educational practice was to “civilize” and prepare Indians for citizenship while providing them with a practical, vocational education (Child, 1998, p. 13). More invasively, boarding school, off or on the reservation, was the institutional manifestation of the government’s determination to completely restructure the Indians’ minds and personalities (Adams, 1995). These attempts at quick assimilation more often than not failed and led to a cultural disintegration (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) indicate, “schools have been at the center of an onslaught to eradicate Native thought, language, culture and education” (p. xxi).

Education geared towards Native people has been focused on efforts by governments and religions to assimilate Native peoples (Starnes, 2006). Child (1998) indicates that the mandating of the separation of American Indian families to best solve the Indian problem was one of the most detrimental quests ever embarked upon by the federal government. According to Kawamoto (2001), the effects of the boarding schools are still felt by most, if not all, American Indians in some way. Deloria concurs:

[Previous American Indian educational effort] resembles indoctrination more than it does forms of teaching because it insists on implanting a particular body of knowledge and a specific view of the world, which often does not correspond to

the life experiences that [Native] people have or might be expected to encounter.

(as cited in Huffman, 2001, p. 16)

These effects of education are still felt today and permeate American Indian families and communities. Lomawaima and McCarthy go on to assert that the war between the federal government and tribes has been waged through and about children and the costs of colonial education has largely been borne by Indian people (2006).

According to Pewewardy and Frey, “one cannot look at higher education for American Indian students without examining the history of federal policy toward American Indians from the late 18th century onward” (2004, p. 32). According to White Shield (2004) the lack of American Indians in higher education cannot be viewed without looking at historical federal policy and the socioeconomic status of American Indians, both of which have direct effects on American Indians today. Further, Reyhner and Eder (1992) conclude that to “understand the state of Indian education today requires an understanding of its past history” (p. 33).

The Meriam Report

According to the National Indian Education Association (2007), in 1928, the Brookings Institute and the Bureau of Indian Affairs brought to the attention of the federal government the deprivation and abuse of Indian children attending school. This report, otherwise known as the Meriam Report, brought to light the poor quality of social and educational services being provided. According to Peacock (2002), the Meriam Report was the first official recognition of the importance of American Indian families and culture in learning. Moreover, Lomawaima and McCarty infer that the Meriam

Report called for a replacement of the uniform course of study through offering local and relevant curriculum (2006).

Nations at Risk

In the early 1990's the U.S. Department of Education chartered a task force to study the status of American Indian education in the United States. In mid 1991 a report was issued along with recommendations that were to set the stage for improving education in Indian country. The report was titled, *Indian Nations at Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action* (U.S. Department of Education, 1991).

The Task Force began their work receiving testimony from a number of different constituents. For example, according to *Walking in Two Worlds* (2007), tribal leaders, parents, educators, and many others gave testimony in order for the Task Force to gain an in-depth understanding of conditions in Indian Education. In addition, the Task Force wanted to identify desired changes in Indian Education. The Task Force then formulated its recommendation, based on research, testimony, and advice from numerous sources including the testimony from hundreds of citizens at regional hearings in several states and reviews of commissioned papers from national experts on Native education (*Walking in Two Worlds*, 2007). As a result of the study the Task force identified four important reasons the Indian Nations are at risk as a people:

- (1) Schools have failed to educate large numbers of Indian students and adults.
- (2) The language and cultural base of American Indians are rapidly decreasing.
- (3) The diminished lands and natural resources of the American Indians are constantly under siege.

- (4) Indian self-determination and governance rights are under constant challenge by shifting policies of the administration, Congress, and the justice system. (Walking in Two Worlds, 2007)

To put things into perspective, the Meriam Report was the first federal investigation that brought to light the dismal conditions in Indian country, especially the failed boarding school policy of assimilation. The Kennedy Report of 1969 recommended increased control for American Indians in education as well as the formation of a National Board of Education. Consequently, The Indian Nations at Risk Report [a response to the Kennedy Report] again brought attention to the fact that Indian education was a failure. Yet, despite the problems of Indian education, some progress had been made, such as the development of the Indian Education Act of 1972 (Warner, 1999). This act provided assistance for education and allowed for federal guidance in any federal legislation regarding the education of American Indians.

Tribal Colleges

Tribal colleges formed out of a response to the high drop out rates and retention issues and to offset problems American Indians were experiencing in higher education. In addition to offering programs and services offered by mainstream institutions of higher education, tribal colleges were established to provide access to higher education for American Indians, especially those who live on the reservation (Cole & Denzine, 2002). According to HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) the tribal college movement was a response to the self-determination movement of Native people. Signed into law by President Carter, the Tribally Controlled Community Colleges Assistance Act of 1978 opened doors to federal funding that had been unavailable to tribal colleges prior to this

legislation. Tribal colleges were established to provide an education that offered culturally relevant opportunities to American Indians (Cole & Denzine, 2002). “Tribal Colleges were a direct outgrowth of adult programs and attempts by Indians to control their own schools” (Reyhner & Eder, 2004, p. 295).

According to Boyer (1997) American Indian students who attended tribal colleges prior to transferring to a four-year institution were four times more likely to complete their degree than those who entered as freshmen. Further, White Shield indicates that tribal colleges are essential in affording American Indians access and opportunity to higher education and meeting the many needs of Indigenous students and communities (2004).

“Tribal Colleges can be described as small, tenacious institutions of higher education that serve the smallest and poorest minority group in the United States under difficult and challenging circumstances” (Stein, 1999, p. 259). Despite these efforts, tribal colleges typically exist in small, rural, isolated areas and operate with limited resources. Therefore the number of tribal colleges represents a small presence in the overall quest to serve the needs of American Indian students in higher education (R.B. Peacock, personal communication, August 24, 2007). Further, because many tribal colleges are two-year institutions there is a general concern they cannot meet the full educational needs of American Indian students (Capriccioso, 2006).

However it is clear tribal colleges are influencing Native Americans and their presence in higher education (Pavel, Inglebret, & Banks, 2001). Pavel et al. (2001) further point out that tribal colleges offer a curriculum that is committed to the culture, the language, and the community, and many tribal colleges are responding to the need of

training Native teachers by forming partnerships with four-year institutions to develop such programs.

Despite the work of Tribal Colleges, retention of American Indian students remains low in higher education. Jeria and Roth's (1992) research indicates that college attendance by American Indian students lags behind other minorities such as Black and Hispanic, only 55% of American Indians graduate from high school and of these graduates only 17% go on to college (p. 3). According to White Shield (2004), in 1995 American Indians reflected less than 1% of all students in higher education. Educational attainment is and continues to be a concern among American Indians across the country (CHiXapkaid & Inglebret, 2007).

Demmert, Grissmer, and Towner (2006) point out that the lack of research on American Indians in higher education is partly due to the fact that the student population is much smaller than Black, Hispanic or disadvantaged White students. However, Pavel and Padilla's research indicates the literature that examines the factors, which influence American Indian attrition prior to degree completion is expanding (1993). Studies indicate there are a variety of reasons for American Indian academic success in higher education (Huffman, 1991). Benjamin, Chambers, and Reiterman's research suggests that perhaps the abysmal attrition of American Indians from college is somehow tied to higher education's often unconscious insistence that they be pushed in the direction of conforming to dominant culture persistence-enhancing behaviors (1993). Further research indicates that cultural isolation, alienation, and cultural conflict can work to hinder access and academic achievement for American Indian students (Cole & Denzine, 2002).

The disjunction between non-Indian cultural expectations found in American higher education institutions and American Indian cultural traditions and ways may place many American Indian students at a disadvantage in college (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; and Huffman, 2001). Ogbu compares the educational experience of American Indians to those of other, as he puts it, caste-like minorities, pointing out that racial minorities (including American Indians) have been subjected to a racially inferior status and subsequently are continually afforded a virtually meaningless educational menu (as cited in Huffman, 2001). According to Tinto (1993) a mismatch may occur between the student and the institution, both socially and academically, which inhibits integration.

Numerous research studies suggest that many American Indians experience difficulties while attending higher education institutions (Boyer, 1997; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Huffman, 2001; Cole & Denzine, 2002). And according to Cole and Denzine (2002) the overall educational success of American Indians in higher education falls below the national norm. A laundry list of barriers inhibiting greater American Indian educational achievement has been cited in the literature. For example, Falk and Aitken (1984), Jeria and Roth (1992), Reyhner and Dodd (1985), and Huffman (2001) found poor academic preparation, low achievement motivation, isolation, a disconnect from the institution, and inadequate financial support to be significant barriers to success for American Indian students.

Additional research indicates a plethora of reasons American Indians struggle and lag behind other groups in higher education. To most American Indian students, the institution (i.e., administration policies and procedures, classroom etiquette, etc.) seems

rigid, overly formalized, and unfamiliar (Huffman, 2001). Huffman further points out that the disappointment many American Indians feel regarding their higher educational experience quickly turns to emotional rejection of the institution. Students report having little value for an institution they perceived as rejecting them. CHiXapkaid and Inglebret (2007) agree with Huffman that almost every American Indian student is apt to experience alienation in college to some degree. Huffman writes that the university was typically regarded as an invitation to assimilation offering only a steady diet of non-Indian culture (2001). White Shield's study indicates American Indian students did not perceive the institution as offering an education that reflected or valued them as Indigenous (2004).

Studies show many American Indian students feel overwhelmed by the lack of familiar cultural connections. For example, Huffman (1991) points to the absence of American Indian representation in promotional materials and school catalogs. Often, culturally, American Indian students even feel alienated from their fellow American Indian classmates (Huffman, 2001). Astin (1985) and Tinto (1993) indicate isolation and lack of personal contact with others as contributing to college departure. White Shield likens the way American Indian students perceive and experience higher education to cultural discontinuity, which she defines as experiencing reality differently than the dominant or mainstream culture. (2004).

Campus racism is common among many American Indian students' experiences. Combined with an already abundant number of obstacles, campus racism only reinforces the feelings of alienation (Huffman, 1991). For example, American Indian students report encountering resentment from financial aid offices regarding supposedly free money for

their schooling (Huffman, 1991). Pewewardy and Frey's (2004) research indicates the campus environment is a critical feature in the academic experience of all students.

Cultural isolation, alienation by dominant cultures, and cultural conflict all contribute to lack of academic achievement for American Indians (Cole & Denzine, 2002). Rousey and Longie (2001) indicate that when education is in conflict with American Indian culture, values, and experiences students have two options: either reject one's culture or rebel against the institution. Rebellion against the institution is usually the chosen option.

Further studies indicate a vast array of personal challenges affect retention of American Indian students. According to research done by HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002), poverty and family concerns increase the burdens shouldered by Indian students. Students may drop out because a car breaks down and there is no money for repairs, or perhaps because daycare is unavailable. CHiXapkaid and Inglebret's (2007) research indicates many American Indian students have additional expenses related to daycare, attending cultural events, and unavoidable trips home. Furthermore, counselors report that alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence are prevalent among American Indian students and their family members. Braxton et al.'s research indicates that for minority students the conflict between work, family, and college may be greater than for other students (2004). According to White Shield (2004), there are many social barriers that impede the success of American Indians in higher education.

Studies indicate curriculum and faculty relations play a role in retention of American Indian students. According to Cole and Denzine (2002), some of the challenges American Indian students face are connected to a curriculum that is not reflective of, inclusive of, or relevant to American Indians. For example, one study shows that

mainstream curriculum does not recognize the dichotomy between American Indian students' needs and that of western curricula and methods (Starnes, 2006). Johnson (2006) states students earning their education degree at Arizona State University report being the only Indigenous students in class and often being expected to speak for Native communities. Further, CHiXpkaid and Inglebret report many non-Native instructors do not take into account Native learning styles when developing curriculum or instructional methods (2007).

Faculty relations are key to American Indian students' success. In general, past studies have suggested that a student-faculty connection is linked to positive undergraduate experiences for American Indian students (Cole & Denzine, 2002). Tinto's research indicates faculty actions are critical in institutional efforts that increase retention (2006).

Promoting Retention

The literature offers suggestions on improving retention among American Indian students. According to Falk and Aitken, family and community support is important to Indian students, and efforts to maintain and expand this type of support may help increase retention among Indian students. In addition, institutional commitment, beginning with top level administrators, that includes special staffing and programs is equally important at colleges and universities that serve Indian students (1984). CHiXapkaid and Inglebret (2007) write that an important aspect of student retention is for important stakeholders to feel a part of the process. Falk and Aitkin further indicate that Indian student organizations and other groups, which provide necessary social support, are a key component in retention. Indians who serve on the faculty, staff, and administration can

provide important support and act as role models for Indian students (1984). White Shield's study shows that mainstream institutions supporting and offering opportunities that further develop and sustain American Indian students' identity aid in retention (2004).

HeavyRunner and DeCelles's research suggests retention programs must affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities, which in turn will enhance students' ability to function in a multicultural society (2002). Studies that closely examine retention factors for Indian students reveal that replicating the extended family structure within the college culture enhances the student's sense of belonging and leads to higher retention rates (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). Further, Braxton et al. (2004) indicate that for minority students whose culture does not reflect the dominant culture of the college or university, student groups of shared culture must be formed. For example, Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) indicate a nurturing, collectivist island in the sea of individualism often found in higher education is important, perhaps more important than whether students are autonomous enough to seek out the support on their own. Hobson-Horton and Owens (2004) report that the more students feel a part of the institution, the more likely they are to earn their degree. Accordingly, academic support services should be in place to further positively influence American Indians seeking degree attainment (Pavel & Padilla, 1993). According to Braxton et al. (2004) the more a sense of community is perceived by a student the more a student will socially integrate. For example, support programs that enhance the social environment for students are needed. (Pavel & Padilla, 1993).

Creating a sense of community that feels family-like enhances American Indian students' pursuit of academic completion (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). Tinto (2006) cites the need for institutions to understand the importance of family in the lives of American Indian students in order to more accurately develop programs for differing students and populations. According to Rousey and Longie (2001), American Indian family and personal concerns become central to the educational experience. CHiXapkaid and Inglebret point out that because of the cultural dynamics of kinship, deciding to go to college is a family decision for many American Indian students (2007). According to Huffman (2001), there is much to be learned regarding the way American Indian college students perceive, operate within, and ultimately experience higher education. However, according to Tinto (1993), there is no easy solution to student retention.

Teacher Education

Today many Colleges and Universities are searching for ways to attract and retain minority students in teacher education programs (Hobson-Horton & Owens, 2004). According to Archer's study, "Almost one-third of the current student population in the United States is from minority groups compared with only 12% being minority teachers" (as cited in Hobson-Horton & Owens, 2004). Astin (1985) indicates that teacher training is the primary way in which higher education influences elementary and secondary education. According to Starnes (2006) non-Native or White teachers are not well prepared to meet the needs of American Indian students. Lomawaima and McCarty write that a child's education should build on the child's experiences and not criticize or correct what the child knows (2006). According to Johnson (2006), Native teachers share with Native students culturally reciprocal ways of interacting and communicating.

The nations increasing numbers of school-age children of color, coupled with declining numbers of teachers of color, creates a sense of urgency to recruit more students from underrepresented minority backgrounds into the teaching profession as well as prepare White teachers who can work effectively with culturally diverse P-12 students. (Bennett, Cole, & Thompson, 2000, p. 461)

Further, the Indian Nations at Risk Report findings indicate the need for revision of the teacher education programs in colleges and universities in order to prepare teachers to work within a multicultural and diverse setting (U.S. Department of Education, 1991).

With the growth of minority populations and the limited number of minority students enrolled in colleges and universities it is critical that teacher education programs recruit and retain minority students in their programs (Hobson-Horton & Owens, 2004). It is evident that teachers from ethnically diverse backgrounds are needed in a highly diverse society (Cole, Bennett, & Thompson, 2003). If teacher educators at mainstream institutions aspire to recruit and retain students of color a broader understanding of the campus alienation these students feel needs to be acquired (Bennett et al., 2000). The Braxton et al. study indicates higher education must enroll and retain a critical mass of minority students embracing a diverse student body (2004). According to Pavel et al. (2001), creating teacher education programs that meet the complex and diverse needs of Native students and communities is a multifaceted undertaking.

Teacher Education/Need for Native Teachers

According to the U.S. Department of Education (1991) high teacher expectations and well-trained teachers influence success in school for American Indian students. The Pavel et al. study shows many tribal communities are focusing on teacher preparation

programs and the need for specific programs tailored to the unique needs of American Indians (2001). Training American Indian teachers is one way to combat the grim statistics that plague American Indian students' educational experiences and low rates of retention. According to the findings of the Indian Nations at Risk Report, improving the quality of teachers and teaching is critical in combating the statistics of American Indian retention (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Studies show there is a critical need for Native educators who will serve as positive role models for improvement in teaching (Pavel, 1999a).

Education is community building--an essential element for survival of American Indian people--and community building is a long-term venture (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004). Only 38% of BIA/tribal schools have American Indian teachers and only 15 % of teachers in public schools serve high Native student populations (Pavel, 1999b). These numbers indicate the need for training American Indian teachers.

In his landmark book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire indicates that in order for the oppressed to become free, they need a theory of action (2001). Preparing American Indian teachers is one theory of action needed for Indian communities to begin becoming self-sufficient again. The Indian Nations at Risk Report indicates if Indian communities are to develop self-sufficiency, building partnerships with colleges and universities developing programs specifically for American Indians to become teachers is a way to combat educational challenges faced by American Indians (U.S. Department of Education).

Summary

“To understand the state of Indian education today requires an understanding of its past history” (Reyhner & Eder, 1992, p. 33). A history of traditional practices of teaching and learning in Ojibwe society is critical to understanding the transformation that occurs for Native people in western educational programs. According to Peacock and Wisuri, “The purpose of traditional Ojibwe education was to both serve the practical needs of the people and to enhance the soul. Together they were the balance of one’s journey on the path of life” (2002, p. 68). Johnston writes that learning comes not only from books but from the world around us as well (2003). American Indians have always educated and become educated, as Cajete emphasizes, in accordance with the act of creativity that goes along with learning (1994). Further, teachings in many Indigenous communities indicate education grounded in traditional beliefs and practices emphasizing the relationship with the natural world (Waller et al., 2002).

According to teachings from an Ojibwe elder, there is one way to come into this world, to walk in this world, and to leave this world and as an Anishinaabe it is your inherent right to understand these things. And so goes the beginning of Anishinaabe teachings.

Babies spent much of their first two years in a dikinagan (cradleboard) where they learned the important life skills of observation and listening. Children would watch the dance of life around them—the play of lights and shadow, the movement of grasses, the sparkle of sun through branches, and the habits of people and animals. As young children they honed their skill of observation and learned the art of listening. All around them were the sounds of life: chatter of the

squirrels, the whisper of grasses, the songs of the wind through trees, and the inflection of voice in their parents, grandmothers and grandfathers, and aunties. The art of listening was further refined into adulthood, as they sought out others for wisdom, as they sought out the deeper meaning of things, and as they sought out all layers of stories. (Peacock & Wisuri, 2002, p. 71)

In traditional Anishinaabe life, learning was a gift passed on through the seven teachings or gifts that thread together a fundamental foundation of knowledge that provides a foundation from which everything else grows: *Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth* (Benton-Benai, 1988). Elders, grandmothers and grandfathers taught about life through stories, parables, fables, allegories, songs, chants, and dances. The elders were deemed to possess the qualities for teaching wisdom, knowledge, patience, and generosity (Johnston, 1976). According to the Indian Nations at Risk Report elders were the transmitters of knowledge encompassing the historical, cultural, and practical (U.S. Department of Education, 1991).

Contributions to the Literature

According to Reyhner and Dodd (1995), there is a limited amount of research on the success of American Indian students. Demmert et al. (2006) found that “the lack of emphasis on Native American achievement partly arises because the total student population is much smaller than Black, Hispanic, or disadvantaged white populations” (p. 5). According to Aragon (2004a) most studies, with the exception of a few on American Indian education, are done on children rather than adults. This study will contribute to the literature in that it is examining closely retention of American Indian students in higher education, specifically retention of American Indian students in teacher education

programs. Further, Swisher, (1996) indicates the need for Indian people to be conducting research and writing about it.

One way to address the needs of the American Indian population is to study American Indian people who persevere and succeed in college and University programs so that others can replicate their success (Reyhner & Dodd, 1995). According to Pavel et al. (2001) Native teacher education programs are a reflection of systemic reform efforts. The literature indicates the need for teacher preparation programs that meet the unique and challenging needs of American Indians but fails to propose specific programs. This study proposed a model to increase retention of American Indian students interested in becoming teachers.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Little is known about factors that influence retention of American Indian students in an elementary education bachelor's degree program. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influence retention of American Indian students in an elementary education bachelor's degree program and to gain an understanding of the participants' perceptions of these factors. This chapter includes the research design, population sample, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

Moustakas (1994) defines research methods as systematic ways of accomplishing something in an organized fashion that moves a study into action. The research design used in this study was qualitative and utilized the phenomenological approach as a method of inquiry. Qualitative design is naturalistic in that the research takes place in real world settings and the researcher does not manipulate the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). "The phenomenological approach, first employed by the German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl, explores how humans make sense of an experience and transform that experience into consciousness" (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

Interviewing is the primary way a researcher can investigate individual experience in an educational organization (Seidman, 1998). Because the phenomenological design of interviewing emphasizes oral transmission of information, spirituality, and community control--tenets reflective of Indigenous values--it was especially appropriate for this study (Boyer, 1997). The questions and methods used in this study are also compatible with the traditional American Indian view that allows for individual storytelling and

listening (Ness, 2001). The interview format aimed to address the issues of American Indian student retention that have been raised in the literature. Responses provided an understanding of the factors influencing retention of American Indian students in elementary education bachelor's degree programs and their successful completion of said programs, as well as insight into understanding the participants' perceptions of these factors.

Study and Sample

The purpose statement of this study was to determine retention factors of American Indian students in an elementary education bachelor's degree program and the participants' perceptions of these factors. Individuals chosen for this study were selected via purposeful sampling. Purposeful or theoretical sampling is used when a researcher selects individuals who meet some informational need to complete the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Those selected through purposeful sampling are selected because they are information rich and offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002).

The participants interviewed for this study were two students and two administrators. The students were American Indians who attended the American Indian Teacher Program at a small private liberal arts college in Northern Minnesota. This American Indian Teacher Program has been in existence since 1984. Students in this program are full-time students and take anywhere from sixteen to eighteen credits. The students in the program earn a double major in either elementary or secondary education and Ojibwe language and culture. Students take in addition to their education methods classes, four credits of Ojibwe language a semester. Students participate in language

tables, cultural activities and attend monthly mandatory cohort meetings. Students are required to begin a fieldwork practicum in a K-12 school setting beginning with their first education class. Student participants can begin the program as a freshman or transfer into the program. Students are required to live on campus their freshman and sophomore year and required to live off campus thereafter. The program cohort of students on average consists of anywhere from twenty-eight students to twelve. At the time of this study, there were twenty students enrolled in the cohort. Seventeen out of the twenty students are American Indian. The program has a consistent retention rate of anywhere between 74% and 82%.

The interview participants brought a range of experience to the interview. The administrators interviewed were a Dean and the Program Director. The Dean had been in her position two years, moving from a faculty teaching position and the Program Director, five years. Of the two students interviewed, one had successfully completed the program and one had not. Successful completion of the program was defined as those individuals who completed all necessary coursework for their degree and were either student teaching or cleared for student teaching. In addition, the participants had to be knowledgeable about the program, willing to participate and willing to be interviewed. The following table provides specific information on the interview participants.

Table 1

Interview participants

Pseudonym	Position
Cynthia	Academic Dean
Marybeth	Program Director
Dan	Student, non-completer
Crystal	Student, completer

General Procedures

The interview format and methodology for collecting data utilized in this study were derived from a method of in-depth phenomenological interviewing described by Seidman, a method which, in essence, allows an understanding of the participants' experience and the meaning they made of that experience to emerge (1998). The qualitative method of interviewing is especially useful in the exploration of a phenomenon, and gaining an understanding of it and tends to humanize situations (Krathwohl, 1998).

The participants were contacted by electronic mail and asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. If interested, they were asked to contact the researcher directly.

The study consisted of one taped interview with project participants. Interviews lasted on average one hundred twenty minutes. Moustakas (1994) describes the phenomenological investigation as an informal, interactive process using open-ended questions. The questions asked in this study offered participants to reflect on their own experiences and offer perspectives on important program elements and insights on how to better serve American Indian students. The participants were asked the same ten

questions (see Appendix A). The interview explored the educational experience of participants, perceptions of challenges faced by Native students, benefits of native teacher training programs, and how higher education institutions can better serve Native students. This mode of inquiry was used to gain an understanding of participants' insights and perceptions of the factors that influence retention. Although the sample size was small, the four participants, having differing roles in the context of a Native Teacher Training Program, offered diverse perspectives on the research topic. Once the participants agreed to be interviewed, a date, time and place were agreed upon as suggested by the interview participants. A consent form was read over and signed by each participant (see Appendix B).

A brief discussion then took place to ensure participants understood the research and the interview process. According to Moustakas (1994) the phenomenological interview often begins with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere. According to Smith (1999), Indigenous methodologies approach cultural protocols, values, and behaviors as an integral part of methodology. As an Anishinaabe researcher it was important to recognize and acknowledge cultural protocol in the research process. An offering of asemaa (tobacco) was given to each participant, as this is cultural protocol. It is the teachings of the Anishinaabeg when you request something from another individual you honor that request with the offering of tobacco. Once the tobacco was given and received, the interview began. Moustakas (1994) explains the importance of the interviewer creating a climate of comfort for participants to respond honestly and to provide detailed answers.

The interviews were transcribed. Each interview was read and coded by hand. There was no computer program used. Each transcript was reviewed individually and categories, themes, and patterns were identified which will be explained in the next section. In gaining this information the researcher hoped to acquire both an increased understanding of the challenges faced by American Indian students and an increased understanding of how the participants perceive these challenges.

Data Analysis

The study relied on the constant comparative method. In this method the researcher looks for key issues or recurring events that then become categories (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). Krathwohl (1998) indicates that, through the use of coding, relationships begin to emerge and provide a lens through which data can be viewed. “This process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories is what is meant by the constant comparative method of data analysis” (Creswell, 1998, p. 57). The data analysis is compared to the data present in the literature review and examined for possible themes and comparisons (Gunderson, 2006). It is the premise that theory evolves from emerging data, so at this time, there is no hypothesis at the initiation of the research.

Validity

Each participant was asked the same ten questions to determine thematic patterns and consistency. The goal of the interview process was to understand how participants make meaning of their experiences. If the interview process allows for the interviewer to gain this understanding it has gone a long way toward validity (Seidman, 1998). From the onset, data collection must be based on a concern for privacy and confidentiality

(Krathwohl, 1998). As a researcher it is important to be aware of and respect the participants' rights (Creswell, 1998). A consent form must be signed which acknowledges protection of the participants' rights (Creswell, 2003). The research was approved by the IRB.

Themes

Classifying, according to Creswell (1998), means reading the text, taking it apart and looking for themes or categories of information. Main themes are given codes (Krathwohl, 1998). Once themes are coded a search for emerging data is done. Seidman (1998) concurs that organizing data into categories is a way of presenting and analyzing interview data. According to Creswell (2003), the use of rich, thick descriptions will validate accuracy of the data analysis.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the methods used in this research project as well as to describe a rationale for the methods used. The population interviewed was described. The chapter includes an explanation of the interview format and the methodology for collecting the data. This study hoped to identify factors that influence retention of American Indian students and to understand the perceptions of these factors. In addition, this study hoped to identify the best of the various practices that aim to increase the retention of American Indian students in a teacher education program. Chapter four will examine the results of the findings.

Chapter Four

Research Findings

The plants and animals were our first teachers. The plants were created first. They were given a common goal to achieve: to hold the Earth together for others who would come along in the future. They were instructed to develop the strongest method of teaching possible, called teaching by example. The animals were next to be created, and they were told to live through all the trials and tribulations of life. ...The struggles of their survival or demise would serve as teachings for the humans who were yet to come. Through the teachings of these stories would come the moral and ethical values of the first humans who were created... We need to be part of the story, a story of being successful in college in significant numbers.

(CHiXapkaid & Inglebret, 2007, pp. 13-14)

When stories are shared they are filtered through the listener's own historical lens, training, gender and political context (Meyer, 2003). Indigenous methodologies approach cultural protocols, values, and behaviors as an integral part of the research (Smith, 1999). Through the sharing of participants' stories and perspectives, this chapter has unfolded. The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the data collected. The data collected explored retention factors of American Indian students in an elementary education bachelor's degree program and the participants' perceptions of these factors. Data were collected from four participants. Each participant was interviewed and asked the same ten questions. The results in this chapter are from the data analysis of these interviews and the codes and themes that emerged from the data analysis. As the codes

emerged, themes were created. The stories of the participants shaped this chapter through the use of direct quotes, profiles, and vignettes.

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that influence retention of American Indian students in a baccalaureate teacher licensure program, the factors that influence successful completion of a baccalaureate teacher licensure program, and the perceptions of these factors. Administrators as well as students were selected as participants in order to offer multiple perspectives on the topic, in hopes of gaining an understanding of the many facets that contribute to the retention of American Indian students.

In reviewing the data several themes emerged from the coded categories. These themes are like threads that weave together the many layers that contribute to retention. The voices in this chapter are bold, honest and forthcoming. Together they offer perspective and experience on the retention of American Indian students. The topic is not simplistic in nature; it is complicated and it is painful, but at the same time these voices lend a breath of fresh air to a very complex topic.

According to the interview data, there are multiple levels of intersection between a student and an institution that can make or break a student's experience. The following chapter outlines these intersections. The overarching headings include challenges, institutions, a kaleidoscope of support, and benefits of a Native teacher education program. Within each of these headings lie sub headings or the themes that describe in greater detail the participant's perspective. The responses to the interview questions were like peeling back layers upon layers of issues, none more or less important than the other. Interview participants spoke of the many challenges that American Indian students face

in higher education. Although the focus of this study was retention of students in a teacher education program it was important to frame the issues in the context of the bigger picture, the higher education institution itself. Very few if any teacher-training programs are insulated from the larger workings of the institution they reside.

Challenges

American Indian people have a very unique history with formal education. Scars of the boarding school era are embedded in our skin. The imprint boarding schools left on Native people is multigenerational. This imprint affects the way Native people view and experience formal education. Chapter two outlined how history has shaped the present state of education for American Indian people. Despite efforts to increase the recruitment and retention of American Indian students in higher education, the number of American Indians going to college is dismally low. The interview data collected from students and administrators highlight many of the obstacles American Indian students must overcome in higher education. These challenges are reflected in both the personal and scholastic lives of the students. The following section reflects the kaleidoscope of difficulties American Indian students encounter in higher education. These difficulties fall into two categories: personal and/or institutional. Dan's voice provides insight into the complexity and layers of these challenges:

A lot of Native students have different learning styles than some, and culture, and I think we need more like individualized attention, more one on one, more flexibility, sort of like more of a special relationship with the instructor, like more trust. I just think our values are different. Like family and culture are extremely important to Native Americans. Like if something comes up in your family, that

has more precedence than everything else and if that involves missing a week or two of class then that's what happens. My sister's fiancé died of an overdose and that took me out of school for a week and family life is really important to me. Cultural things like ricing also require time to be taken out to attend and that means missing class again. Those are the three biggest things for me. Well let me add to that. I think the most important thing for all Native Americans especially in this day on the Fond du Lac Reservation and the surrounding reservations it's drug use and alcoholism like abuse with families and extended families and communities and that can be anything from physical to emotional to sexual abuse and that, I know that it's um, intergenerational like it's been happening for a long time and it continues to happen because nothing's being done about it. And I would say 90% of the people my age and people I grew up with are either drug addicts or alcoholics and that to me is the number one reason why Native Americans don't go on to college. In my eyes it affects the education because I know so many that aren't going to college because they're drug addicts or alcoholics or whatever the case. And those that do go to college struggle because they're either struggling with addiction or it hits so close to home that it affects them in different ways. Whether they're depressed or dealing with certain family members or whatever the case may be, that's really the big issue.

Marybeth shares Dan's perspective regarding the obstacles many Native American students face:

I think one of the biggest challenges is they don't have, some of our students don't have family support whether it's their significant other, whether it's some

family members, they're kind of doing this, some of them are doing it by themselves and I see it being a huge challenge. The next is financial. Another for some is their skill level, they've come out of Tribal Colleges or at the high school level and they don't have strong reading skills or strong writing skills and it's a disadvantage in every single class. Those who accept help do far better but then there are those who just have that pride and don't want to accept help. They don't know how to accept it. Another challenge the students have shared with me is they have to leave their Indian-ness at the door. They can't be who they are and can't say the things they want to say because they are afraid of what others will think of them.

Crystal identifies the hurdles she overcame as a program participant:

One of my biggest challenges going through my program was that I had to do everything completely on my own. I luckily got tuition assistance but that covered my tuition. I had to cover all the other living expenses and I was driving, commuting to school which was tough too. I didn't have a computer so if I had any work to be done I had to spend all my time up at school so a lot of time was spent on being here [at school] or being at work and balancing that and then also trying to just find time for my family was really difficult and so one of the challenges I had to overcome is basically the fact that I just had to work and get through it and get it done. It was just not easy all the time, I mean there were times when I had very personal things going on and it was taking away from my studies and it was very difficult.

Isolation/Identity

Culture strengthens identity (Meyer, 2003). When individuals are secure in their culture it tends to make them secure in who they are, providing a strong foundation from which to grow and live. Identity development is an important aspect of human development. Due to colonization, much of American Indian culture was stripped from families and communities. Recent efforts to restore that sense of culture have begun on both a personal level and a community level. This loss of culture has affected identity development in many American Indian people. The data revealed issues of identity became a hardship for student participants. Not looking Native enough seemed to be baggage for some students. Dan described the identity politics he experienced as a student:

Some of us you know are really traditional, raised that way since birth and then others like myself that are mixed bloods, you know, don't naturally look very Native American and it was almost like a proving ground. Like I had to prove myself to everyone. Like with the [Ojibwe] language especially because a lot of people look at me and they just think I'm a White boy trying to fit in with them, when they hear me speak the language they're just amazed and it's like they have instant respect for me.

Cynthia was also aware that identity is a problem for American Indian students: "I've had students say they have to leave their culture, being Indian at the door." This dichotomy can inhibit both learning and fitting in. People, all people, need to fit in, need to feel like they belong. Making connections and developing relationships is an important component of success in higher education and if students feel they have to leave their

selves at the door, that component has been taken away. Freire (2001) writes about internalized oppression and how it plays out in people's lives. The interview data would seem to suggest that internalized oppression as outlined by Freire has definite ramifications in the retention of American Indian students in higher education.

Crystal describes how the larger institution's general lack of understanding regarding Native culture is often a hardship:

I think some of the things people struggle with sometimes in our Native teaching program is that the college itself doesn't understand the culture so those students might struggle with being accepted or being misunderstood. There have been many times that has happened. You know even with smudging, that's a huge issue and I think we probably deal with it every year because the general community the general campus they just, they just don't understand what it is or why it's so important. So I think something that higher education needs to teach...they need to be open to education about that population of students. And I think that the population of students, the American Indian students need to go out there and build awareness. Well, we can say it's a two way street. There are always going to be things that the non-Native community would never even think to ask or they may comment on things but have no idea it could be offensive.

Curriculum

There are so many facets to the higher education experience that attending college should be a challenging, enjoyable experience. Unfortunately, for many American Indian students that is not the case. For those that stay in college the experience can be a steady dose of discomforts, injustices and, more often than not, isolation. Another aspect of the

higher education experience that troubles American Indian students is the curriculum. Curriculum came up time and time again in the interviews as being problematic, both from administrators' and students' perspectives. The curriculum issue seemed to revolve around the fact that, since little effort was made to incorporate American Indian content into the curriculum or acknowledge the American Indian experience, the curriculum was rarely relevant to American Indians lived experiences. And on the rare occasions when, as part of the curriculum, American Indian students were acknowledged it was usually to be singled out as the expert on the Indian topic. According to Cynthia, "I think they're called upon to be experts sometimes, the structure is not compatible to their cultural ways." Being called upon to explain, support, clarify or contribute to from an Indigenous perspective, when covering an Indigenous topic, felt unnatural.

Lack of knowledge regarding Native culture could be frustrating for faculty as well as for students seeking information. Marybeth reflects:

I think the curriculum was a challenge too because it didn't mean a lot to me and even with some human relations courses, you know, I wanted to know more about the Native community, how to interact, how to work with the value systems, the cultural systems, but no one had the knowledge to give me even when I asked pointed questions.

Marybeth also noted the lack of accuracy when Native culture was included in the curriculum: "I think one of the biggest challenges Native students face in the classroom is the curriculum, what I would say is very anti-Indian, it includes all kinds of misinformation about American Indian communities."

According to Cynthia, an effort to improve the curriculum and offer a more relevant curriculum program is underway: “One thing we are working on is helping our school of education faculty and staff change their curriculum so more American Indian perspective is embedded...”

The interview data indicate that American Indian students feel little if any connection to the curriculum. One way to mitigate that is to include Native American culture and language in the curriculum. Marybeth spoke of the importance of culture and language in retention and the role it plays in their teacher education program:

We try to do other activities like language table, and bringing in speakers. One of the biggest things we are trying to do this year and it’s not necessarily me cuz I’m not a good speaker but the other staff are using the language more on a daily basis. They’ll ask the students questions in Ojibwe or the emails they send out will all be in Ojibwe, just to help the students feel more comfortable, give them more exposure.

Dan also addressed the importance of language and culture in the curriculum:

Having language and culture be the main component of every course and having qualified instructors who know the language. The language has to be you know, essential, it has to be the central component and to make sure the students in the program understand the material, that they’re getting it. One on one time, having student mentors so like people in the classes who are struggling or that are just beginning and not as advanced as you they set times to come in and meet with you. Having more advanced students mentor incoming students or those that are struggling.

Crystal described the cultural experiences the program offers:

We take American Indian Studies courses on history, family, law...we do cultural activities, we go to immersion camps, we go to conferences. We have the culture in many different ways. I mean within the program itself we done wild ricing, maple sugaring. But also breaking out into the community, being with elders and going to pow wows, different things like that are really important.

Obviously the inclusion of culture and language in the curriculum go a long way in retaining American Indian students. Quality instructors who know how to infuse culture and language into the curriculum make the coursework both meaningful and important to Native students. Education should be meaningful and important in the lives it is a part of.

The Institution

The higher education institution itself plays a major role in the retention of American Indian students. The voices of the study participants reveal the need for a systemic change rather than simply the addition of a particular program, person, or resource room. This coded category takes a more holistic look at the institution and how it impacts the experiences American Indians have. Interview participants spoke of the many facets in which institutions can be more welcoming and more involved in the retention of American Indian students. The identified themes in this category include involvement of high-level administrators; creating a place for Native students; flexibility; and the role of faculty and staff. According to the data, the retention of American Indian students, for all practical purposes, requires a systemic change.

Administrators

One might justifiably wonder if it is necessary for people throughout the institution's entire chain of command to be involved in the problem of retention. Rarely, if ever do students interact with top-level administrators. However, as demonstrated by the interview data, high-level administrators do need to be involved. When top-level administrators get involved Native students notice. When asked how higher education institutions can better serve Native students, Marybeth posited the following:

By providing some sort of communication or some sort of system that allows communication to happen with, between not only just their [the student's] immediate instructors or faculty but the administrators up to the VP or even you know the presidents themselves. I think some sort of line of communication.

Purposeful and not just, "Oh, I have a problem I'm going to go complain." I think the administrators need to be involved, you know your VP's and your Deans and with some of your activities they should be invited. They should see what happens and they should participate. That's what I hear from my students, is when you know the President shows up at an activity or event the students are like, "Wow, did you see him, he was here. That's so cool." You know, even if he stops in for a brief time just to acknowledge that the event is going on I think is really important.

Cynthia concurred: "I think high level administrators need to talk to the students.

Actually sit down and talk to the students, find out what's not working too well. Find out what would be better, you know."

Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Deans are all very busy people. Showing up, talking to students, taking time to participate in some small way sends an incredibly strong message to students that they matter, that they are an important part of campus life. If one is to look at the institution more holistically, more circularly in nature, administrators are important links in the chain. For American Indian students, this makes what may appear to be an unfriendly place a place that cares. These efforts cannot help but permeate the institution, impacting and hopefully destroying the image that higher education is not for Indian people.

Space and Place

Environment is a critical factor for American Indian student success in higher education. An important aspect of this environment is what might be called space and place. Space and place is something both administrators and students find necessary for American Indian students. Both spoke of the importance of students having a place to call home, a safe haven within the larger workings of the institution. Somewhere many referred to as “just a place to go to.” Marybeth explained the importance of “just a place to go” this way:

I think another important piece that we can, most institutions have these, but it’s a place for Native kids to go. Whether it’s an American Indian resource center or culture room, a place for them to hang out in that has the same standards as all other rooms at the college and there’s a welcoming place where students can decide how that place is operated. It really needs to be a student driven setting, a safe place.

Dan provided his own perspective on place:

Like at our college, we had our own, we called it our culture room. Even something like that as a central place. Having a central place where students in the program and even outside of it like friends or other students can just come and hang out, study together, you know talk, eat lunch together, whatever. It's a big thing. It really helped me.

Dan clearly feels that place is important. Sharing meals, conversation, and building relations is an important part of the higher education experience for him. Crystal concurs:

We have a resource room where it's kind of like a socializing hub, it's kind of like a study place, kind of an all purpose room. That is our space, and really if we didn't have that room I don't think our program would be what it is.

Cynthia supports Dan and Crystal's views on the importance of place in the lives of Native students:

I would say having a place, we had a cultural room but it was, I mean the furniture was old, it wasn't too nice and so in the last few years things changed and it's really beautiful now. It sends a message that we want you to have a nice space...they have nice new furniture and I think that tends to leave a message that we value the program.

Having a place to go that reflects the values and norms of American Indian people gives the students a much-needed break from the hustle and bustle of the institution. I fondly remember, as a student, quiet breaks in my institution's Anishinaabe Club Room. It seems American Indian people have a fondness for place; it is an important concept to Native people. Building relations and coming to know a place are important to Native people. Place provides American Indian students a strong foundation from which to

launch themselves into the larger maze of the institution and gives them a landing spot when things get difficult.

Flexibility

The data have painted a picture of the many challenges American Indian students experience when going to college. In order for students to be successful in college, the institution needs to be flexible in its ability to respond, in its mode of operation, and in its policies. Faculty must also be flexible, able to address the needs of students when, as Cynthia puts it, “life happens.” Students and administrators both spoke of the need for flexibility in regard to American Indian students. Marybeth offered the following view:

A lot of our students, probably half of our students are mothers and fathers and allowing them time if they have sick children or need to go home to their children, they’re allowed to do that because, face it, they wouldn’t make it if they weren’t allowed to do that. They’d drop out or they’d be kicked out of class for attendance, so most of our faculty, and not all but most of our faculty are able to work around that and give other assignments to help them attending classes. In addition I think the institutions need to be willing to change their rules or bend their rules in order to meet the needs of Native kids. For example, when students need to pay their bills by such and such a date or they can’t register for classes, so we’ll have our contact person in the business office we go to when these things arrive and she’ll sit down and work with the student and say “OK if you can let’s do a payment plan and let’s do it this way, maybe you can’t pay this bill now but maybe in the summer so then we’ll let you register.” So they bent the rules or went around them, which allowed one of our students to register.

The above perspective clearly shows how one institution was able to bend their rules, as Marybeth put it, to meet the needs of an American Indian student. Higher education institutions are driven by policies, procedures and rules. However, in this case, the flexibility shown to this student kept the student in college.

Crystal understands the need for flexibility in working with American Indian students:

Well going off my experience a good program um, it has to be structured but it also has to um be flexible with students because something that I've realized is that for the most part, um the type of people who are in the program like that are people from a Native American background, and they generally come from I guess a harder way of life than most people do and so to have that flexibility means that you're allowing for those students to know they can, they can have their life, you know, they can still go through their struggles but have the structure to stay focused.

Faculty and Staff

American Indian people are a relational people. Relationships are a key component to the lifeblood of American Indian people. More often than not, American Indian people view themselves in relation to those around them. It is this epistemology that American Indian students bring to the college experience. For this reason, faculty and staff play a critical role in the retention of American Indian students. A close relationship with and a connection to faculty seem to make a difference to American Indian students in their higher education experience. Dan spoke of the importance of a trusting relationship between student and instructor: "I think a lot of Native students

need one on one individualized attention...like more of a special relationship with the instructor, like more trust. I've experienced prejudice from some of my instructors."

Another important aspect of the intersection between students and institution is the staff that students come in contact with. Students need the assistance of registrars, advisors, financial aid staff, and many others in order to be successful. These encounters between students and the system need to be positive ones. Unfortunately, for American Indian students, often they are not. Cynthia expressed concern that less than positive interactions between students and staff may interfere with American Indian students' success:

I think colleges are addressing faculty but we are forgetting staff. I'm thinking about the initiatives, like the registrar office, I mean our students interact with them all the time and I'm not so sure they are as welcoming as they could be. Not intentionally, but just lack of understanding, lack of knowledge you know. I mean we pride ourselves on hospitality; it's one of our [the college's] five values. It is human nature to want to be where we feel comfortable.

Individual attributes of the higher education experience impact American Indian students but the overall atmosphere or environment of the institution conveys a message to students as well. The environment that is established goes a long way in retaining American Indian students. Environment encompasses many things. When asked how higher education institutions can better serve American Indian students Dan replied:

Above all else there has to be a welcoming atmosphere. Native students just don't feel comfortable in bigger schools, you know they're obviously outnumbered. There aren't enough support groups or activities aimed at them, like celebrating

their heritage. I think there's a lot college could do to make it easier for Native American students to enroll there and retain but it's obviously going to take a lot of work. I mean there isn't one clear answer but at least I think at least having a staff that has um it's not an equal amount but a proportionate amount of Native American faculty that can advocate for the student. Make sure their needs are met, you know something even as simple as that. Having people higher up, you know in the chain of command or whatever you want to call it to advocate for the students and offering more classes about Native American history, or art, or language or religion. Colleges really need to start adding more coursework for and about Native Americans.

Tribal colleges have made progress in creating a welcoming Native reflective environment for their students. It is the premise on which they were founded. Larger four-year institutions can learn a great deal from tribal colleges about creating a more welcoming environment that reflects Native people's lives. As mentioned above, there is no "clear answer" but rather many things institutions can do to be more welcoming.

A Kaleidoscope of Support

Support was a key component from both the students' and administrators' perspective to retaining American Indian students. The word kaleidoscope in the above heading is used to impart the many different ways in which the data defined support. Support sounds like such a simple thing but in the practical application of it, it means much more than just being available; it means being involved. This type of student support might be referred to as putting the humanness back in the educational experience. The data derived from these interviews indicate that a holistic approach to supporting

American Indian students may be the best approach. There were several themes that were reflected under the category of support. Support had a broad definition in this study that encompassed the cohort method, monetary assistance, and staff.

The Cohort Method

American Indian people are a relational people. Relationships are an important aspect of Native culture. Building relations among and within a small group of students very much adheres to Native culture. Being mindful of this cultural norm, it makes sense that a cohort method would work well for American Indian students. The cohort method, a group of students going through a program together, taking classes together, is all about relationships. Administrators and students spoke of the importance of the cohort method, a method which has proven to be an effective aid to retention. Marybeth reflects on how the cohort method assisted her in higher education, "I would never have finished if it wasn't for the cohort, I would not have gotten this far without this method, just the peer pressure of staying in, that's what I needed". The relationships developed in the cohort model often include caring about each other's progress, the peer pressure referred to in the above quote. Marybeth offered the following perspective emphasizing the importance of relationship building as provided by the cohort method:

I think the biggest benefit next to the financial aspect of the program is the support they receive from each other. I don't think most of them would make it through if they didn't have each other. I really don't. When I listen to them they're always talking about school work, I mean they talk about their personal problems as well, but they talk about school work, they talk about their instructor, what they need to do for certain classes. They ask each other for help like you

know, “Do you have this book?” so there’s a lot of personal sharing. So I would say that that’s the greatest benefit, just knowing other students are there. And we support that too, either you know both academically but even off campus we try to do fun activities where they can network with each other and support each other outside academics whether it’s going to a movie, just going out to breakfast at Uncle Louis, we want to have them mingle.

Crystal reaffirms the importance of the cohort model:

We have a lot of parents in our program. We’ve had parents who have gotten pregnant while they’re in the program and they’re trying to make their doctors appointments and raise their family and we’ve also had people who have confronted these problems and are welcomed into the program and they realize how difficult it is to be in school as we all, all of us, I think we realized that we have to be there for each other. We had to become like friends or colleagues. We have to be there to support each other and in a sense become our own counselors because we were usually the only ones we had to talk to at that time because our families didn’t really understand how difficult it was for us to be here. We became family. We called each other a family.

For students, building relationships is an important component of success in college. The data indicate that while student-student relationships are important, faculty-student relationships are important as well. Marybeth’s comments about movies and breakfast indicate an awareness of the important and necessary aspect of relationship building in the retention of American Indian students. Dan describes the different ways in which

support works for him. His voice reinforces the importance of relationships with both other students and faculty.

I think like smaller class sizes and then like having time to be able to meet one on one with your instructors to insure that you're you know you understand the material, if you're having problems they know about it. Things of that nature and then just also having like activities where the students in the program can get together and bond. Even something as simple as study groups. Just being Native American and especially Ojibwe and in this area I think that kind of a program, that's who everyone is, they share that common identity. I think that there's already like support there to begin with like a natural support group because you share that common identity.

Cynthia explains how a mentoring program can provide support:

Something we started this year is a mentoring program so other new students who are in are paired with someone who's been in this college for a couple years so they have someone, you know they have a cell phone number, a way to give them a call and ask a question or ask for help.

It's clear that American Indian students respond favorably to building relationships with the people they experience higher education with. The data indicate the importance and the need for building strong and meaningful relationships. These relationships go a long way in retaining American Indian students.

Monetary support

From a monetary aspect, American Indian people are one of the poorest minority groups in the country. This contributes to the low numbers of students going to college

and staying in college. The interview participants spoke of how important financial support is to American Indian students. When asked what specific challenges she thought her program participants faced Cynthia responded, “The first thing that comes to mind is money. Many of them have children, many of them have jobs so how to balance child care, jobs and coming to school and paying their bills.” When asked the same question Marybeth responded, “Financial, especially those with little ones. They’re going to school full time, they’re working full time and they’re raising children full time and I honestly don’t know how they do it. It’s just insane, I couldn’t do it.”

Clearly any kind of monetary support will aid in the retention of American Indian students in higher education. The monetary support provided by federally funded teacher education programs is invaluable. Many programs are able to provide tuition, books, and fees support as well as a living and child-care stipend. These grants have been a response to the challenges American Indians face in higher education. Clearly, this is seen as a very important component to the retention issue of American Indian students.

Program specific support

As a federal response to the high need for American Indian teachers, a national call for Native specific teacher training programs was put out. These programs are grant funded and offer many different components in training participants to become teachers. One benefit of this funding has been that programs are able to hire staff to work directly with program participants. The services provided by such staff are invaluable. Cynthia described the enormous benefits of program staff:

The grant provides a lot of support to the students. We have a program director that does a lot of organizing activities for students...for different kinds of cultural

activities but we also have two staff, one of their roles is primarily tutoring, and it's talking circles, meeting individually, helping through financial aid loopholes, registration problems, advising. I mean its sort of like whatever you need you'll get the help you need. Finances, you're struggling with a faculty member and you don't know how to negotiate that. All the logistics, even if you have a flat tire, they go down and help somebody get their tire fixed. They help them with a checking account, figuring it out. I mean all the day-to-day things that create stress in people's lives, that is her job. It really helps a lot, those two people are full time and they're just everywhere with the students. I mean very accessible, and that's probably a big advantage, the biggest strength in our program. It's life stuff, so they can actually go to class.

Many of these teacher-training programs go above and beyond what mainstream programs do to retain their students. The data indicated the family-like relationship that develops between students and those who work in the program are critical in retention. These efforts reflect more closely a Native epistemology in the sense that meaningful relations are built and the students' lives are central to the educational experience, not something separate or extra. As Marybeth commented:

And we as faculty and staff, all of our students have our cell phone numbers as well as our personal home number in case they ever need anything. And we have students who will call once a week, sometimes at night where it can't wait until tomorrow because they're stressing and need to know something right now so they have that. It's like their lifeline and so we do sometimes get calls you know, things you don't want to hear, you know about. For example, one student got

hauled to detox, you know. At least we know what's going on when they're not in school then. We know, kind of have a heads up about what to do and letting teachers know and things like that.

In addition to program specific staff, many programs are able to hire additional faculty, in many cases Native faculty, to teach some of the courses. The use of Native faculty can also contribute to retention. Dan described the personal impact of having instructors who are Native:

I like how the instructors are Native American and you can relate to them. They've faced the same challenges as you. They know what it's like. They know what you're going through and the challenges and struggles you face and how hard it is being a Native American student, trying to get a degree at college, you know where you're a minority. There's a lot more trust and understanding like when I have a Native teacher, you can joke and laugh, they get your sense of humor because we have our own sense of humor, you know that most White people don't understand. And you just feel comfortable around them, it seems natural. You don't get that with like White instructors.

The data do not imply that only Native instructors can be successful with Native students, but having qualified faculty who know and can relate to their students definitely makes a difference for students. And in the case of Native students it is Native instructors who make a difference.

Summary

The four voices in this chapter describe the multiple layers that affect retention of American Indian students in a teacher education program. Through these voices it is clear

that American Indian students have needs that generate a long list of responses, requiring that systems examine their practices if they are serious about increasing the retention of American Indian students. As one participant put it, “there is no simple answer” but identification of the challenges is at least a place to start, so that eventually institutions can better serve the needs of this population through the development of programs that meet the needs of American Indian students.

The data revealed both administrators and students share similar perspectives on retention factors of American Indian students in higher education. The importance of support and the use of the cohort method as strategies to assist with the numerous challenges American Indian students face was resounding from both students and administrators. Monetary support seemed to be deemed as equally critical in American Indian student retention. It seemed the administrators’ lent a more prominent awareness regarding the importance of American Indian content reflective in curriculum. Although students spoke of this need, the students’ perspectives encompassed culture and language activities outside of the classroom as an important part of their higher education experience.

One stark difference between the students’ and administrators’ perspectives was regarding the personal issues plaguing American Indian students. The students’ voices spoke more poignantly about the social ills facing American Indian students and how these ills affect retention of American Indian students. Student participants spoke openly about the ill effects of abuse and the dysfunction, poverty, chemical use and abuse, found in many American Indian communities and families as a hindrance to American Indian

student success in higher education. One participant blamed these things as reasons why his peers are not in college.

The data generated from this study provide a comprehensive look at the many factors that impact retention of American Indian students. The thematic headings of challenges, both personal and scholastic as well as the theme of support capture the voices of participants'. The challenges are numerous that face American Indian students in higher education. The purpose of this chapter was to report the findings of this study. Chapter five will provide a brief discussion and summary.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Implications

“The war for Indian children will be won in the classroom” --Wilma Mankiller

This final chapter will emphasize some of the key lessons learned from this study. The chapter consists of a brief summary of the study; the literature review; the findings; implications of the study, and finally offers recommendations for further research. This study reviewed the professional body of literature as it related to retention of American Indian students in higher education, and more specifically retention of American Indian students in teacher education.

The findings in this study offer new insights and support the data in the literature review on some key and critical factors in the retention of American Indian students. According to Boyer (2003), the contemporary challenge for American Indian education is to create schools, colleges, and educational systems that allow American Indian students to succeed at no less than the rates experienced by the nation as a whole. The results of this study clearly indicate the need for the creation of programs and partnerships that address the varying concerns of American Indian students in order to ensure success in higher education.

Summary of Study

Chapter one described the purpose and problem statement of the study as well as the significance of the study. Very little has changed in the education of American Indian students in mainstream systems. Only about one-third of American Indian students who enter college will complete their degrees compared to three-fifths of non-Indian students (Boyer, 2003). According to James (2004), the field of education calls for a theoretical

model constructed by Natives for Natives that provides a model to navigate higher education. This study hopes to offer one such model and to contribute to the current body of literature and research as it relates to the topic of this study.

Chapter two provided a review of the professional literature. The chapter reviewed the literature on retention of students in higher education, then examined the literature on retention of students of color in higher education, and finally reviewed the literature on retention of American Indian students in higher education. The broad review in higher education provided a context in which to put teacher education retention. It is the purpose of this study to paint a picture of the higher education experience for American Indian students in order to better frame the experiences of American Indian students in teacher education. The literature review unveiled prior studies that indicated retention of American Indian students is a complex phenomenon. Because of the very small numbers of American Indians in the profession of teaching, the literature revealed very little in this specific area. This gap in the literature is a key finding.

Chapter three described the methodology used in this study. The study used qualitative research as a method and interviewed four participants, three female and one male. The participants' perspectives came from different vantage points, which offered the study various perspectives on the topic. Two administrators and two students comprised the participants of the study.

American Indians and research has historically been a destructive combination, most notably for American Indian people themselves. Historically, much of the research conducted on American Indian people was done by non-Indian people and provided little if any benefits to the community being researched. Swisher, in earlier writings, has

indicated the importance and need for American Indian people to conduct research in and for their own communities (1996). As an Indigenous researcher it was my intent to incorporate into the process the norms and values prescribed to me, both as a way of authenticating the research process and to create a mutually respectful mode of inquiry with interview participants. Therefore, the interviews were conducted in a place chosen by the participant. For example, sitting beside a river and taking in a geographical place, grounded us in Anishinaabe values. There is no separation between American Indian people and the environment (Cajete, 1994).

In addition, each interview began with an offering of asemaa (tobacco) to the interview participant as an acknowledgement of their gift of time and story. This acknowledgment is important in that it allowed for the exchange of story. This is also humbling to me as a researcher, to be the recipient of such a gift as personal story. It is those stories and perspectives that guided this study.

Chapter four provided the findings of this study. The findings in this study clearly articulate the need for a holistic approach in working with American Indian students. The Braxton et al. (2004) study reaffirms the need for an integrated design approach to increase retention of students of color in higher education. The needs of American Indian students go beyond academics in their higher education experience. This study revealed that, for many Native students, what is going on outside the institution often takes precedence over the responsibilities of being a student. When communities as a whole are plagued with poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, oppression, and suffer from historical trauma, these things have an impact on the educational experiences of American Indian students. What if students did not have to experience an either-or situation when pursuing

a four-year degree? What if students' lives, culture, and academics could be intertwined? As I listened to the participants of this study, I found myself asking these questions.

The data collected revealed themes that wove the findings of this study together. The overarching themes of the study were broken down into the following headings: Challenges, The Institution, and A Kaleidoscope of Support. It was these overarching themes that provided a framework in which to organize the research findings. Research indicated that the future of American Indian and Alaska Native people is entrusted to those who understand the significance of overcoming the barriers preventing college enrollment and success in college (CHiXapkaid & Inglebret, 2007). CHiXapkaid and Inglebret write about the need for Native people to be successful in higher education, but the history of American Indian education is riddled with injustices. Therefore, as a collective, Native people by and large have not been successful in western educational systems. Due to the struggles with education, much of the work, support, efforts, and money have been geared towards improving the K-12 educational experience for Native people. It was not until the tribal college movement that attention began focusing on American Indian people in higher education. Now that many tribal colleges are operating on somewhat stable footing, research and degree programs are receiving attention. The literature revealed the need for further research in the areas of higher education as it pertains to American Indian people. This study hopes to contribute to filling the gap in the literature.

Challenges

The challenges faced by American Indian students in higher education are numerous. Participants in this study spoke very poignantly about the disruptive effect of

drugs, alcohol and various types of abuses on the lives of Indian people. These disruptions came in varying degrees and levels. Some people struggle with substance abuse directly; others are affected indirectly.

In addition to the personal challenges described, the voices of the participants spoke very specifically in regard to two areas: curriculum and identity/isolation. The curriculum offered in mainstream institutions often reflects a western European epistemology. It becomes imperative institutions and programs offer curriculum that is accurate and reflective of the Indigenous population it is serving. Many programs, specifically teacher education programs, are driven by national and state licensing standards and other criteria, all of which reflect mainstream curricula. It is possible however, to offer a curriculum grounded in an Indigenous epistemology that still meets state and national standards. Pavel, Banks, and Pavel (2002) write about the challenge Native teacher preparation programs have to meet the diverse cultural and educational needs of American Indian students while still being in compliance with national and state standards, however there are programs that work and are making an impact. In doing so, American Indian students see a reflection of self and validation of world view in their coursework which makes it relevant and meaningful.

The Institution

This overarching theme seemed to encompass the mechanics of how institutions work and how the people work within them. The data revealed that institutions and the way in which they operate tremendously affect the retention of American Indian students. How students view the institution is critical but more important is how the institution views the student. Perceptions of belonging can be conveyed to students through the way

in which people work with them. For example, I recall a story by one interview participant describing an African-American woman stopping in the registrar's office needing directions and waiting seven minutes before her presence there was even acknowledged. This type of interaction conveys a message. If students are overlooked, ignored or consistently finding themselves feeling disengaged from the process of their experience, departure from the institution or program is likely. The Minnesota Minority Education Partnership reports students of color either transfer out of the institution, stop-out or dropout altogether (2001).

A Kaleidoscope of Support

The support theme seems to make sense on a number of levels. From the use of the cohort method, to monetary support, to teacher education program specific support, American Indian students thrive in an intimate and involved environment. The Pavel et al (2002) study indicated that American Indian students need to feel love, care and support that reflects an extended family concept when experiencing higher education. When put into practice the type of support American Indian students need seems to act as a buffer between the student and the larger workings of the institution. This support buffer allows for students to be able to navigate the larger system. In many four-year degree granting institutions the student enrollment is over ten thousand students; without support mechanisms already in place American Indian students would not receive the encouragement necessary to be successful in this larger environment.

A Look to the Future-A new model

The current educational experiences have been anything but successful for American Indian students. Most would agree that there are pockets of good things going

on in Indian country but obviously most of these efforts are not far reaching enough as American Indian people continue to have the lowest student retention rate of any minority in higher education. In order to change the low retention rates, each community needs a theory of action, a plan that is designed to meet the needs of that particular community. Higher education institutions must be part of the communities in which they reside.

The retention of American Indian students in higher education is complex. It goes far beyond a recruiter, an advisor, a center, or clubroom, which many higher education institutions offer. These things are important and play a critical role but they fall short in combating the complex retention issues of American Indian students. This comment is in no way intended to minimize these efforts, but if institutions and programs are serious about the recruitment and retention of American Indian students, much more is needed. Since American Indians have the lowest retention rate of any minority group in the country, systemic change in higher education is called for in order to address this problem.

So what would a model that aims to address the needs of American Indian students interested in becoming teachers look like? The data collected in this study provide keen insights into improving the retention of American Indian students in a bachelor's degree teacher education program. For the past eight years I have had the privilege of working with a program similar to the one outlined in this study and have seen first hand effective strategies that seem to work with Native students. Based on the data from this study there are some key and critical factors that retain American Indian students. Most of what seems to work appears simple in nature but when put into practice

is really quite complex. The comprehensive model incorporates and addresses the following complex needs of American Indian students:

- Monetary support
- Two pronged curriculum
- Space and place
- Holistic advising
- Cohort model

Monetary support

Grant funding or some type of monetary support seems critical. From a monetary standpoint American Indian people are one of the poorest groups in the country. The poverty rate in reservation areas is three times the national average (Ambler, 2003). Financial issues can be a barrier that prevents students from going on to college. Falk & Aitken's (1984) study indicated that lack of finances contributed to American Indian students not attending or completing college. However, there are many foundations and federal agencies that have broadened their funding scopes in hopes of increasing the number of American Indian teachers. Grant writing and foundation work is time consuming but in the end can provide students with much needed financial relief. Many grant opportunities provide some combination of funding that often covers tuition, books, living stipend and/or childcare expenses. Since many American Indian students are parents, often single parents, therefore assistance with child-care expenses alleviates that stressor. In addition, as they become more financially self-sufficient, many tribes are making scholarships for college more of a priority. There is a misconception that often

American Indian people go to college for free, which is simply not true. All participants in this study could not emphasize enough the importance of financial support.

Curriculum

Curriculum encompasses many things. Meeting licensing standards is of utmost importance when training teachers. It is what completes the degree program. However, it seems justice would be served by a curriculum offering both state and national standards and standards reflective of Indigenous language and culture. This is not an easy feat.

Indian people spend lifetimes disagreeing about culture and language. Should culture be taught? Do you teach the double vowel system (Ojibwe specific)? What dialect do you speak? These conversations go on and on and all the while our languages are not being taught or spoken, cultural teachings are not being conveyed, and teachers are not being trained. There is no place for gatekeepers or culture cops in teacher education programs and the teaching of these important concepts should in no way be entrusted to a select few. We're in this together and there is much to be learned from each other and the strengths that are reflected in each person's contribution.

Putting together a curriculum that meets state standards and offers a framework in which to provide culture and language opportunities are critical. It seems important to first define what is meant by culture. How deeply are you willing to go when teaching culture? A teacher education program I have worked with is fortunate in that it is allowed to use the Minnesota American Indian Learner Outcomes as a framework in which to teach Ojibwe history, arts, government, and other topics within the curriculum, all of which encompass culture. The American Indian Learner Outcomes is a state provided framework developed by Indian people. In no way are sacred ceremonies or other private

spiritual teachings taught. This is one approach. Each community and each program needs to find their own comfort level and own approach. The key point is that Indigenous language and culture provide the foundation of the curriculum. The participants in the study encouraged the inclusion of culture and language into their program's curriculum. They spoke of meaningful experiences participating in sugar bush and wild ricing, attending summer culture camps, hosting collegiate wide symposiums on Indigenous culture, arts, music and teachings. There seemed to be a reoccurring voice saying that separate culture classes were not enough but rather the infusion of mainstream and Indigenous concepts equally in coursework was needed. American Indian students seem to respond favorably when included within the curricula construct. This favorable response aides in retention.

Space and place

Space and place is a concept meant to convey the importance of having a place for students to congregate. This concept is reiterated in the work of HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002). They write about the importance of creating sense of community that feels family like. Creating a space that is a reflection of self contributes to the sense of belonging and ownership. Space and place also mitigates the isolation issues many American Indian students experience in larger mainstream institutions. In addition, having a place for students conveys a strong message that you are important enough to merit a home base while you are here. This not only sends an important message to those students but also to the broader collegiate community. It seems important and productive that a vision set for a distinct group of students be conveyed to the system as a whole. That is systemic change. Too often in higher education we operate from within our

separate departments and offices and fail to see the bigger picture in which we work.

American Indian student retention requires an aggressive agenda which, when guided by a group of dedicated people, can quickly spread throughout the institution.

Holistic advising

Holistic advising seems to be the glue that keeps it all together. Holistic advising provides the support necessary for barriers to be removed or worked through in order to facilitate retention and graduation. Holistic advising has been criticized or sometimes viewed as a form of handholding. I challenge that notion and propose a thought process that reflects thinking more along the lines of putting the humanness back into the educational experience. I am not proposing getting sucked up in the vacuum of internalized oppression, where excuses and guilt become part of the construct in which we encourage and support students. Too often we mitigate the realities and complexities of working with American Indian students. We don't push harder, push longer, challenge enough, or dream bigger. It seems we simply give up and hide behind the system's rules and regulations as reason for failure. Ironically, those rules and regulations are the very things we aspire to change. The warrior in us is defeated.

Having a specific advisor is important in so many ways and on so many different levels. The participants in this study have indicated that this is a critical piece of the retention puzzle. Because of the many variables at work regarding American Indian students, the advising concept, specifically the role of a traditional academic advisor, needs to be redefined. The advising provided should reflect holistic outreach efforts. Advising should assume the form of talking, listening, attending classes, and meeting with students one-on-one. This concept gives the student a base to work from or, in this

case, a specified person to work with. Study participants' statements provided a powerful testament to the importance of the holistic approach. Their statements outlined a construct of the advisor/student relationship that included such interaction as: "Going to lunch, helping get a car fixed, having someone to call even in the evenings, meeting off campus for coffee" and "helping balance check books." These statements echo the need for the building of student/advisor relationships that are meaningful, purposeful, and relational. The literature supports this concept as indicated in the work of Vander Schee (2007), which indicated that more often than not the root cause of students' problems in higher education are related to nonacademic factors that result in poor academic performance.

Cohort method

In the "cohort method" a small group of students go through a program together and a sense of shared responsibility, not only for themselves but for each other, develops. This method allows for meaningful dialogue within the group itself and also facilitates communication between students and faculty, helping to ensure that students are meeting program requirements. A practice used among the cohort method is to instill in students a feeling of being a part of something sharing a common goal. In this case the common goal is program and degree completion. Participants in this study used the term "family-like" over and over again when describing the atmosphere the cohort method creates. The participants in this study must attend a program required monthly cohort meeting where program staff check in with students, any problems or issues of concerns are raised and suggestions for improvements are conveyed. The cohort method appears critical in

retention of American Indian students. The cohort method seems to allow students to develop relationships amongst each other that contribute to their success as students.

The cohort method makes sense when working with American Indian students. Relationships are an important aspect to any Indigenous culture. American Indian people are relational and historically have placed a strong value on community and family relationships. Group or collected wisdom is often seen as superior to individual wisdom. Allowing students to meet for monthly cohort meetings and having students take a majority if not all classes together builds a foundation for success. The participants in this study have spoken to the benefits of the cohort method and have seen first hand the benefits of the cohort method. Students take responsibility for each other and collectively put their hands and heads together to achieve a shared goal.

A dear friend of mine, Lester Jack Briggs, left me with an awesome responsibility. Jack was the previous president and one of the founders of Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (FDLTCC) located in Cloquet Minnesota. Jack was president when I worked for FDLTCC many years ago. Jack believed ferociously in Indian people. He never backed down and never dodged a fight for Indian people. Jack dreamt bigger, he fought harder, but left us much too soon. Struggling with an illness that eventually took his life, Jack asked to see me shortly before he walked on to the spirit world. Of course I obliged and went to see him. He told me our children need teachers, good teachers. Smiling, I agreed. He then went on to ask me to promise him something. His words are the foundation from which I work today. He said, "Amy, never give up on our students. They will start and stop, leave and come back, but when they knock on your door, always answer it and walk them through it. When you get tired of doing this, it is

time to leave this work.” Jack’s words permeate my very being today. His words are a driving force as I write this paper. I have felt Jack beside me on a number of occasions as I struggle with the words, sentences, and thoughts that complete this paper. It is like having someone sit beside you, a presence you cannot see but certainly one you can feel. That is the kind of imprint Jack left on people.

Putting Jack’s words into action is not easy. I have been criticized on a number of occasions for trying to live this philosophy but if we see this degree quest as a quest much larger than ourselves, then living this philosophy is worth the criticisms, the stress and the agony it often brings with it. Having said this, however, people need to be successful on their own merits. Going to class, succeeding in fieldwork, exams, and projects are the responsibility of the individual. Sometimes however, it is the comfort one finds in knowing someone is there which allows the individual to navigate their own path to success--in this case degree completion. It is this comfort that specifically helps American Indian people succeed in higher education. Pavel et al. (2002) remind us of the need American Indian students have to feel loved, cared for, and supported; and the importance of faculty and staff looking out for their welfare. Picking someone up when they have made the effort to try something or when a person is simply trying again is not a bad thing. It is extending that hand of love, caring and support.

It seems if we can erase some or all of the complexities that life throws at people and allow the student to focus wholly on becoming the best teacher he or she aspires to become, we have truly transformed the educational experience for American Indian students. It seems too often there is a separation of the educational experience and the person. This fragmented approach has not worked for American Indian people and

contributes to the lack of success many Native people experience in higher education. Our culture, values, and beliefs are in all that we do and should be recognized and valued in educational systems and programs that we are a part of. College persistence is more likely if student's identities and lives are a part of the college or university culture (Braxton et al., 2004). Moreover, it is not enough to simply develop programs for American Indian students if they are not part of a comprehensive holistic package. Simply putting programs together without providing the support and guidance necessary for the retention of American Indian students is really doing the students a disservice. Simply adding American Indian content to curriculum and offering language opportunities is really not enough. Unless the student outreach, guidance component, and relationship building is there, little will change for American Indian students in higher education.

This study has provided invaluable insight into the gaps of the current literature as well as a sharpened awareness of the need for training American Indian teachers and creating programs that meet the specific needs of these students. The model described in this study is one model. It is not intended to be the sole answer to the low retention rate American Indian students face in higher education. American Indians are needed as doctors, researchers, scientists, and in many other professions. This particular study offers a specific look into teacher education and how better to serve American Indians interested in becoming teachers. If the war for Indian children truly is to be won in the classroom, only the best teachers should be leading this charge. Training teachers is an awesome responsibility; training high quality American Indian teachers to fill these classrooms is not just a responsibility, it is a necessity. I have always believed that to do

something extraordinary you sometimes need to take extraordinary measures.

Extraordinary measures are needed to ensure that American Indian people not only succeed, but contribute to, and engage themselves in their higher educational experience.

Implications of the study

The following recommendations reflect the findings of this study. The findings suggest there are improvements needed in practice. The following recommendations suggest the need for improvements in programs that train American Indian students interested in becoming teachers and for higher education institutions that are interested in improving the overall retention rates of American Indian students.

The implications of this study are vast. First and foremost the implications for American Indians are significant. The implications for teacher education programs and institutions of higher education are of equal significance. To address the needs of American Indian students in teacher education there are a number of things that need to be done. This study offers one comprehensive approach that requires a significant amount of resources and commitment; it provides a new conceptual model for understanding factors that influence retention of American Indian students in higher education, specifically teacher education.

First, if teacher education programs are serious about retaining American Indian students there is a need for applying a holistic approach when working with American Indian students. This concept was evident throughout the research and is well documented in the literature. The Lotkowski et al. (2004) study reiterates the need for efforts that focus on both academic and non-academic needs of students to improve retention. I recommend a program specific advisor who works solely with American

Indian students. This approach could not be more critical in serving American Indian students. American Indian students tend to bring with them ramifications of historical trauma, multi-generational trauma, internalized oppression, and the ill effects often associated with poverty, racism and chemical abuse to their higher education experience. Either directly or indirectly these things impede their being. To not work with the whole student is simply a disservice to the student, to their story and to their journey.

Secondly, the findings in this study are in line with findings of previous studies, which indicate it is beneficial to incorporate the culture, values and norms into the higher education institution. This effort can assist in American Indian students' sense of identity and perhaps mitigate the isolation many American Indian students feel when pursuing their higher education degree. However, this is one small step to a greater degree of detail needed in retaining American Indian students on the part of the institution. Current research and the findings of this study indicate the need for systemic change if American Indian student retention is truly going to change. Higher education faculty, staff and support people need to educate themselves about American Indian retention and working with American Indian people.

Thirdly, teacher education programs can ensure curriculum is inclusive of the culture and language of their American Indian students. It is well noted that American Indian students need to feel a sense of inclusion in the curriculum. For example, the American Indian Learner Outcomes, a Minnesota Ojibwe based curriculum can and should be used in accordance with general education requirements in the state of Minnesota. In addition, faculty can include current research in American Indian education to compliment contemporary research in education covered in coursework.

Finally, teacher education programs can provide a place for students to congregate. A “home away from home” atmosphere can be established on campus with the specific program. This study included perceptions on the importance of this concept.

Lastly, any work to assist in American Indian students’ financial obligations for degree completion should be included. Whether it be through scholarships, grant funded support or other means of financial assistance, working with students to secure financial support and assistance will certainly aid in the retention of American Indian students.

Recommendations for further research

Teacher education programs specifically designed for American students are relatively new. The federal initiative to train one thousand new teachers is still under way. There is much to be done in the context of American Indians and higher education. The following are recommendations that are a result of this study for further research. This further research will aim to address the needs of American Indian students in higher education and specifically teacher education.

First, more work exploring the perceptions of American Indian students as it relates to student retention is critically needed. In addition, there is much to be done in training American Indian teachers. It has been proven and examined that American Indian teachers make a difference in the lives of their American Indian students. There is a critical need for further research to be done on the retention of American Indians in teacher education programs. For example, more qualitative work could be done to uncover the stories of students who are successful and complete teacher education programs. This data will add to the overall research on success of American Indian students in higher education. This is critical so that programs can be improved or

developed to serve the needs of American Indian students interested in becoming teachers.

Secondly, there is a need for further research, which could include specific endeavors that include partnerships with tribal colleges and communities. The literature revealed tribal colleges have success in retention of American Indian students. Perhaps, larger four-year degree granting institutions can explore ways in which to work with tribal colleges to increase American Indian students' access to teacher education. This would also create a potential sharing of resources. In addition, this research could investigate why tribal colleges do better in retaining American Indian students and could provide invaluable data for larger four year degree granting institutions to improve their work with American Indian students. This data could potentially aid larger institutions in implementing systemic change.

Thirdly, due to the small sample size of this study, further research should include other teacher education programs or data from American Indian students in teacher education. This data could include additional factors that aid in the retention of American Indian students. For example, further research could include a large-scale study.

Additional data collected from other teacher education programs are needed to support the findings of this study.

This study offered multiple perspectives or vantage points of the study's topic interviewing both administrators and students. Future research could include a larger sample of administrators and students. This future research could compare administrators and students' perspectives on retention. This would provide comparison data, which would prove to be valuable.

The findings in this study are in line with the findings of previous studies, which indicate it is beneficial for American Indian students to be a part of programs specifically designed for American Indians. This includes offering a curriculum that is reflective and inclusive of American Indian culture and language and being a program that offers strong holistic advising that does not separate the student's lives outside of school from the schooling experience.

Lastly, as an Indigenous researcher, it is not easy to conduct research on things you hold near and dear to your heart. It is not easy to write about dysfunction in your community and family. It is not easy to hear stories of racism, abuse, giving up, injustices or any other form of oppression. Writing about these issues calls attention to them. But attention is exactly what is needed if we are to reverse the trends experienced by American Indians in higher education, specifically teacher education. American Indian education needs bold leadership, louder voices, dreamers, and progressive ideas that aren't afraid to challenge the status quo in mainstream institutions. It is these things that will increase the number of American Indian people in teacher education.

Freire writes to overcome oppression each community needs a theory of action (2001). What is the theory of action for American Indian education? Will my son enter school facing a drop out rate of 50%? Will he have teachers who can sing him Ojibwe songs and teach him his language? Will he see a reflection of himself in the curriculum that is taught? Cajete (1994) explains, "that if our collective future is to be harmonious and whole...or if we are even to have a viable future to pass on to our grandchildren, we need new ways of educating" (p.23). A giant leap towards this vision is creating new ways of educating and training teachers. Creating opportunities for American Indian

people interested in becoming teachers will go a long way in both improving the retention of American Indian students in higher education and will in addition, increase the likelihood my son and his American Indian relatives, will hear their songs, see their faces, and hear the stories of those that came before them in their schooling experience.

To the research that has come before, and the research that is to follow,
miigwech!

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Can you briefly describe to me your higher education experience?
3. What are your perceptions of the challenges American Indian students face in the classroom?
4. Did you face these same types of challenges as a student? Can you tell me about these challenges?
5. What challenges did you overcome as a participant in the program or do you perceive to be challenges for program participants?
6. Can you please describe the benefits of the Native teacher education program?
7. What types of support or professional development opportunities were offered to you in the program or do you see as necessary for program success?
8. How does culture and language fit in the teacher education program?

9. What recommendations would you make for a successful teacher education program?

10. How can higher education institutions better serve Native students?

Appendix B

Consent Form

Consent Form

Administrators and Students Perceptions of Critical Factors in the Retention of American Indian Students.

You are invited to be in a research study on retention of American Indian Students in a teacher education program. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation/role within a teacher education program. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.This study is being conducted by: Amy A. Bergstrom, EdD Candidate,

Educational Policy and Administration, University of Minnesota

Background Information **The purpose of this study is:** identify factors that influence retention of American Indian students in an elementary education bachelors degree program.

Objective of this study:

- To gain perspectives of administrators and students regarding retention factors of American Indian students in an elementary education bachelors degree teacher education program.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in one, audio taped, interview, lasting no longer than 90 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The study has minimal risk: perceived risk of this study may be that participants may not want to discuss some subject matter There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation: You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject, unless you are willing to disclose your identity. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The audiotapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet that only the researcher has access to. The audiotapes will be destroyed within one year of the study by the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of the Study : Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time with out affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions : The researcher conducting this study is: Amy A. Bergstrom. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at my home number, 218.525.2291. or cell phone, 218.340.8238 or email at abergstr@d.umn.edu. You may also feel free to contact my program advisor Dr. Frank Guldbrandsen at 218.726.8172 or email at fguldbra@d.umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650. ***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*** **Statement of Consent :** I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date:

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date:
